Author's response to reviews

Title: Empowering patients through eHealth: gathering relevant evidence from local experiences

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Dear Editors,

Please find attached our manuscript “EMPOWERING PATIENTS THROUGH EHEALTH: GATHERING RELEVANT EVIDENCE FROM LOCAL EXPERIENCES”, which we would like to be considered for possible publication in BMC Health Services Research as Research Article.

This article has been previously submitted to Implementation Science, but the Editor has invited us promptly – without sending it in review – to submit it to BMC Health Services Research because of a better fit with the scope of the Journal.

In this article, we have something new and interesting to say in the ongoing debate about the role that eHealth-based projects could play to improve the current paradigms of care delivery though the empowerment of citizens/patients.

In this view, our article offers new insights to further the debate on how to gather relevant evidence from local experiences about eHealth and patient empowerment. In fact, despite the wealth of experiences developed in the last years, few would contest that it is still difficult to build a consistent story on the role that eHealth might play in empowering patients. In particular, the European Commission (EC) recently funded a number of pan-European eHealth projects aimed at empowering European patients/citizens thus transforming the traditional patient/citizen roles in the management of their health (e.g., PALANTE, SUSTAIN, CARRE, HeartCycle, Empower etc.). However, the heterogeneity of the healthcare systems, of the implemented services and of the target patients, the use of ad-hoc definitions of the salient concepts (e.g., patient empowerment, value, ease of use etc.) and the development of small-size implementations have prevented the dissemination of “relevant” results and the development of cumulative knowledge. As a result of these issues, there is a lot of valuable evidence about the role that eHealth might play in empowering patients that remains dispersed and does not inform evidence-based policies at the EC level.

In this debate paper, we offer three main lessons learnt within the PALANTE Consortium about the capability of generating relevant evidence from eHealth services in nine European Regions. These lessons might provide new elements for fuelling the ongoing debate.

A preliminary version of this article has been presented at the eChallenges e-2014 Conference (29th-30th October, 2014) taken place in Belfast, Northern Ireland, and included in the conference proceedings.

This manuscript is an significantly enhanced version of the previous one: we crystallized the third lesson and refined the first and second ones by implementing all the feedback collected from the attendees at the eChallenges e-2014 Conference and from the European Community Project Officer and Reviewers.

Finally, we confirm that:

- This paper has NOT been submitted to other journals for consideration and it is NOT under review;
- We do not have any competing interest;
- The study does NOT rely on a clinical trial (thus we do not have any registration number) and data that have been collected to do NOT refer to the clinical domain;
- The project has been funded by the European Community within the CIP Framework Programme 2007-2013 (CIP-ICT-PSP-2011-5).
According to the requests provided by the editor, the section “Competing Interests” and a statement related to the involvement of patients in terms of legislation and ethics are included in the manuscript.

We look forward to hearing from you in due course.

With best wishes,

Emanuele Lettieri on behalf of all co-authors